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Draft report

Addendum

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Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001 (item 4 (b))

Section 2. General Assembly affairs and conference services

1. At its 26th and 27th meetings, on 22 June 1999, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered section 2, General Assembly affairs and conference services, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001 (A/54/6 (Sect. 2)).

2. The budget section was introduced by the representative of the Secretary-General who responded to queries raised during the Committee's consideration of the budget section.

Discussion

3. Satisfaction was expressed with the accomplishments achieved after the restructuring of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services at the end of 1997. The view was further expressed that the restructuring of the Department made the usage of conference services, facilities and resources more cost-effective.

4. The importance of the activities under General Assembly affairs and conference services was stressed. It was noted that the human resource levels had been stable in the face of increased workloads. It was also noted that while the workload was increasing, as reflected in the workload statistics presented, the overall level of resources has been significantly reduced. Concern was expressed that those factors would likely have a negative effect on the timeliness and quality of the conference services provided, which, as also noted, already required improvement. It was felt that an evaluation of the workload should be carried out in the rationalization of the level of resources.

5. The introduction of new technologies in the work of the Department was welcomed, but with the qualification that it should not compromise the quality of services. It was noted that remote translation and interpretation should be properly evaluated and tested to ensure that a high standard of quality and delivery was maintained. A view was expressed that remote interpretation should first be approved by the General Assembly before it was put to use and should be used only for special conferences. The view was expressed that more emphasis should be added to the narrative in the overview regarding the increasing activities

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of the Economic and Social Council and that mention of the maintenance of the Council Web site was missing from the list of outputs of subprogramme 3.

6. It was pointed out that there was inequitable treatment of conference services in the various duty stations. The view was expressed that conference services in Nairobi should be treated in the same manner as conference services in New York, Geneva and Vienna and that it should have been included in the budget section. Concern was also expressed over the levels of self-revision of translation. It was noted that an increase in the use of temporary assistance and ad hoc contractual services to provide translation would increase the need for revision and that it could be difficult to meet that need with the current permanent staffing levels. The view was also expressed that greater reliance on outsourcing of translation services would require adjustment of the grade structure of staffing to provide for more revision work at the senior levels. It was also noted that the interpretation service in Vienna did not enjoy a full complement of permanent staff, resulting in greater reliance on the more expensive temporary assistance. Concern was expressed that the quality of translation and interpretation needed to be improved. Serious concern was expressed about the quality of translation of documentation in Spanish at Vienna.

7. On the subject of the cost-accounting system, the issue was raised as to the availability of in-house expertise in that area so that there would be no need to use external consultants for that project and, consequently, effect some savings for the Organization. With regard to the control and limitation of documentation, a question was raised as to whether the number of documents could be reduced.

8. It was observed that a number of mandates still had to be translated into activities in the programme of work. It was further observed that the description of activities in the budget fascicle did not clearly reflect what was to be achieved or accomplished.

9. It was noted that expected accomplishments had not been included in the budget section. It was further stated that it would have been feasible to include those accomplishments. It was also noted that it was difficult to identify expected accomplishments owing to the complexity and the nature of the work carried out under the budget section.

10. The view was expressed that programme managers needed to implement more fully the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, which require self-evaluation and identification of activities that are inefficient, ineffective and irrelevant.

Conclusions and recommendations

11. The Committee endorsed the programme narrative of section 2, General Assembly affairs and conference services, and decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it be approved with the following modifications:

(a) New paragraph 2.35 *bis* should be added after paragraph 2.35 and the remaining paragraphs renumbered accordingly:

> **"2.35 *bis*. The Division will also conduct consultations and coordinate the assignment of responsibilities for the implementation of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions and follow up to ensure timely action by relevant bodies."**

(b) At the end of paragraph 2.46 (c) (i) before the word "coordination", the word "and" should be deleted, and after the phrase "meetings away from Headquarters", the phrase "and consultation and coordination for the assignment of responsibilities for the implementation of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions" should be added;

(c) In paragraph 2.46 (c) (ii), after the words "limitation of documentation;", the phrase, "compliance with resolution 53/208 B on format of reports;" should be added.